115 In my congregation at the station of Shiluvane was an old convert baptised, odd to relate, by the name of a professor of divinity of Lausanne, *Viguet*. He was a clever man, but not always a very good Christian, I must confess. He possessed a splendid memory. Having been headman in a village of Thonga refugees in the Spelonken, he gave me valuable information regarding the mysteries of family life as well as about the initiation ceremonies. His home was Tsungu on the Limpopo but he had moved to the Transvaal during the succession war of 1862. He was certainly a first-rate informant, possessing a clear head, always using the technical expressions and illustrating his points with great skill. He and Mankhelu have taught me most of what I know about the Northern clans. I learned however many other facts from *Mawewe*, the poet-laureate of the Nkuna court and from *Simeon Gana*, one of my pupils who belonged to an old and important family, and also from others.

115 In 1907 I came back to the coast to start in Rikatla (18 miles North
124 of Lourenço Marques) a Training Institution for our work in Portuguese Territory. There I again found my old friend Spoon, who had been baptised Elias and was one of the elders of the little Church; he had grown old, but was still of the same merry character and disposed to communicate anything he knew. Another man was his co-elder there, a Ronga of the Mazwaya family called *Mboza*. I found him to be a very intelligent man, quite an authority on the rites of the clan. He had been "possessed" and had gone through all the initiation ceremonies of the Ngoni possession, having become an exorciser himself. So he was able to give me new information on this mysterious subject. I undertook a systematic investigation with these two men in 1909, taking as a guide the set of questions prepared by Prof. J. Frazer for people collecting ethnographical material, and giving special attention to the question of the taboo. During this study, which took me many months, I was more than ever impressed with the immense complexity of the life of a South African tribe!

115 In quoting my sources of information I must also mention the
126 pupils of my school. Every Tuesday night we had a meeting in which one of them had to relate a story, to describe a custom, to tell a Native tale... His companions then added what they knew, and as some of them were grown up men, these debates were often very instructive.

I was able to collect in all more than one hundred tales; most of them have been published in my *Chants et Contes des Ba-Ronga* and

1: Junod M-5 (1895-1909)1927 Thonga

CHAPTER II

THE EVOLUTION OF A WOMAN FROM BIRTH TO DEATH

Essay of a Ronga girl on the subject.

124 In July 1897, the School Inspector gave to the big girls of the Swiss Mission school at Lourenço Marques the following subject for an examination in composition: "The life of a Ronga woman." This is the translation of one of the pupils' essays on the life of their country women:

846 "When a girl is born amongst the Ba-Ronga, people come and
302 congratulate the mother and say: "A ma buyeni mati," that is
854 to say: "Let the water come!" When the time is at hand when she will come out of the hut, ochre is crushed for her and a calabash full of the fat of *nkuhlu* almond is prepared, and the two ingredients are mixed and smeared over her.

"Her curly hair is stretched out in corkscrew fashion, and ochre is put on it to transform it into a kind of rats' tails. (This is the operation called *hora ngoya*.) The mother also smears herself with ochre, and puts on her head a crown of small strings (shikupu) (1). Then, when the child lets her head fall on account of the weakness of her neck, a plaited string, which is just the right size for a necklace, is tied round her throat. 'Thus,' they say, 'her nape will be strengthened.'

854 "A small calabash with medicine is given her to drink; they also prepare for her a small pot of the medicine, and they say it

(1) I have heard this custom explained as follows: the mothers amuse the children by shaking their heads; the small strings dance about and make the babies laugh. This can only be true of infants already two or three months old.

124 178 164 783 765 The description I have given of the *lahla khombo*, translating exactly the narratives of Mbozà, Elias, and an old widower called Magingi, refers to the rite as it was performed in the normal fashion some twenty years ago amongst the Ba-Ronga. Now customs are changing. There is, all around the town of Lourenço Marques, an agglomeration of Natives coming from many tribes. Immorality there has become terrible owing especially to alcoholic excesses, a free and enormous sale of adulterated wine taking place in this region. The widows are sure to find there a hundred men for each of them, when they wish to cast away their defilement. But in this promiscuity the poison of syphilis makes terrible ravages. According to our medical missionary, 90 % of the 783 Natives are contaminated by this disease. When the men up 765 country saw that their wives came back ritually purified but 178 physically contaminated, they began themselves to accomplish the necessary act. This has become the general custom to such an 833 extent that, when a widow goes to Majlangalen, (such is the name of that hell of drunkenness and immorality), it is now said of her : "She will refuse to stay with her legal heirs!" However the law of the *lahla khombo nhoben*, to cast away the malediction in the bush, remains inexorable in the three cases where the defilement is considered as being of the worst kind : if the [845] husband died of phthisis or of leprosy, or if the woman has had twins.

Old widows who can find no lovers may be purified by means of drugs.

765 587 e) *The year of widowhood.* Though the widows have found new husbands, they still remain in the old kraal. They must accomplish there "a full hoe," viz. a whole year of ploughing. In their new fields they leave the dry sticks of the mealies of the year before, in such a way that everybody passing by will know at once that this is the field of a widow. But what they harvest this year will belong to the new husband. They have now the right to *fambelana*, viz. to go to each other. The suitor brings clothing to the woman, and the woman pays him visits with jars of beer. They belong more or less to each other. But the marriage of the inherited woman is not absolutely settled. Her

192 *khempfa*, he sits down very tired ; *yinti*, he stands listening attentively, etc.

The *facial expressions* are minutely described by a great wealth of such words : a man says : *langu*, he looks at something ; *lori*, with attention ; *dloto*, intently, and for a long time ; *pari*, with anger ; *dlanya*, with kindness.

Let us take another step forward and we shall find another category describing the *state of mind*, the feelings of the heart, which are also phenomena of vision in as far as they correspond to given attitudes of the body or to certain expressions of the features. A man says *gee*, he is happy ; *kono*, he fears ; *nkwi-nkwisi*, he is in a bad humour ; *doko-doko*, he covets ; *punavuna*, he has pity.

By means of such adverbs *phenomena of Nature* and even *abstract ideas* can be described. Heaven says, *mphu*, it becomes dark ; *dzunu*, the day breaks ; the smoke says *tobi-tobi*, it ascends to heaven ; the water, or the rays of the sun, say *lululu*, they begin to feel warm ; the fire says *lasi-lasi*, it is seen flickering far away.

Abstract ideas. Men say *bi* or *kutlu*, they are all killed, to the last one (total destruction) ; somebody says *kwemetelo*, he does not attain his end, etc.

● [124] The list of descriptive adverbs which I have collected comprises more than 250 of them. Most of these were obtained in the following way. When teaching my pupils the Bukhaneli, viz., the Grammar of their own language — which I always found a very interesting and useful subject of study for them — I asked each of them to write down at once 50 of these strange words. Without hesitation they complied with my demand, one of them writing as many as 70. Almost all of them were different. This shows the extreme wealth of the language in this respect. It is no exaggeration to say that, in Thonga, there are ten, perhaps twenty times as many descriptive adverbs as those quoted by my 151 pupils. In dealing with the characteristics of the Thonga or 192 Bantu mind, I think they are worthy of close consideration. These thousands of words, instinctively formed to express the impression made on the brain by any kind of phenomena, prove the existence of a wonderful power of description. The Bantu

your food a little of the earth of the country which you have left ; this will provide the transition between the old and the new domicile (See I. p. 49). 823

Metals known to the tribe before the coming of the Whites were few. (See page 137). *Nhumbu* or *nsimbi*, iron, *nsuku*, copper, and *ntchopfa*, a name applied to all white metals (tin, silver, etc.) are the only Native names for metals. There is no word for gold. 135

V. *The Vegetable World. Thonga Botany.*

While Bantus possess a very limited knowledge of Astronomy, Geography, Mineralogy, etc., while their ideas in these domains are in no way deserving of the name of Science, they are much more advanced as regards Plants. Here it is quite allowable to speak of a Science, a rudimentary Science, no doubt, but a true, precise knowledge which has been transmitted from past ages and which denotes a real power of observation. 815

The Delagoa flora is not very rich. I have succeeded in collecting between four and five hundred different kinds in a herbarium which I sent many years ago for classification to the Herbier Boissier in Geneva. In February 1893, before forwarding the second lot of exsiccata, I gathered together some Natives of Rikatla in the hut which I had pompously styled a Museum and, having promised them 1 s. each if they consented to remain till the end of the examination, I submitted the dried plants to them, asking them their names, their uses, etc. The result of the inquiry was marvellous. My areopagus did not seem to be a very choice one : an old woman, as dry as my exsiccata and smoking her pipe, another with ochre-smeared hair, a young one, with a baby on her shoulder, an elderly one-eyed man named Hamunde, my milkman. After them came the young chief Muzila, walking slowly, swinging the tails of his belt. This chief, notwithstanding his social rank, showed gross ignorance of botany ; but some of the others knew the name of almost every plant ; had I had a *ñanga*, a medicine-man, amongst them, I am sure I should have obtained 137 124 815 815 756 824